

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.

In order to foster a greater appreciation and understanding for the art of jazz performance, a “Jazz Mentor” Program has been developed at the district level for grades 9-12. This practice, in place since 1991 and featuring a 22 piece Teacher Jazz Ensemble, is designed to assign a district music educator as a mentor for all high school jazz musicians participating in the District High School Jazz Ensemble.

The practice is innovative in that it is not just a musical ensemble whose focus is solely on performance. Rather, it is an ensemble that affords the student participants a two-fold opportunity: performance and “private” applied lessons on their instruments with a highly distinguished professional musician.

The selection process for student participation is based on auditions that occur during the month of December. Once completed, rehearsals run from January through April, with the ensemble meeting once a week for two hours. Performances are scheduled for May, highlighted by a district performance “The Black Tie Jazz Bash.”

Ideally, the mentor and protégée are able to create a close-knit rapport by occupying the same “chair” in the ensemble. The mentor is able to work on a one-to-one basis with his/her protégée during all rehearsals and performances. This allows the student an opportunity to be in an environment in which all areas of musicianship are intensely studied.

Under the tutelage of the mentor, the student sees first hand how a professional musician approaches his/her role in a musical ensemble. Having the opportunity to work with his/her mentor, the students’ skill as an individual performer and ensemble member are greatly enhanced and in turn, the student is then encouraged to become a mentor for future band members.

The ensembles’ featured performance, “The Black Tie Jazz Bash,” has been well received within the community since its inception. It has become a community event, receiving extensive coverage throughout the State of New Jersey. It intensifies the presence of the Performing Arts in the community, raising aesthetic awareness and helping to create a bridge between school and community.

The practice generates high student achievement through the creation of student standards that expect a high level of performance proficiency. The recognition and self-esteem attained by student participants is evident throughout the schools and community. Students are recognized as performing artists and in turn, provide models of achievement for future band members.

Replication of this practice can occur at any level and with any genre of performance group. Mentorship can occur not only between teacher and student, but also between student and student.

2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the core curriculum content and/or workplace readiness standards addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s).

The educational needs addressed by the Jazz Mentor Program are applicable to both music and general education. Students are introduced to the necessary employability skills, work habits and work ethics they will need to prepare for a career in music, or any other field they choose.

The practice allows students to hone their skills as performers. Their level of musicianship is increased through the study of jazz rhythms, scales, harmony and improvisational techniques.

Working on a one-to-one basis with a mentor allows the student to receive attention that would not be possible in a normal jazz band environment. Students have the luxury of having a professional musician working hand-in-hand with them, correcting their mistakes and encouraging their improvement during the entire process of rehearsal and performance.

Each of the content standards in the arts are addressed in this practice. Students gain an appreciation of jazz as an art form through the rehearsal and performance of the repertoire associated with the program.

Perceptual, intellectual and physical skills are addressed through the process of rehearsal and performance. Proper practice, performance and preparation skills are also stressed (CCCS1.2).

Students demonstrate an increased aesthetic awareness and knowledge of the process of critiquing through the constant and on-going self analysis of repertoire being studied (CCCS1.1, 1.4).

Students gain a better understanding of the historical, cultural and social significance of jazz and how it has helped shape the world of music (CCCS1.5).

Students develop a skill for the planning of form, structure, and sound through the utilization of arts elements and media for use in public performances (CCCS1.3, 1.6).

All cross content workplace readiness skills are incorporated throughout the practice. The application of music tools, technology and media is most evident through the use of electronic instruments and accessories (WPRS#2).

Through the use and development of jazz improvisational skills, encouraging students to experiment with sound combinations, students are taught to use the process of critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving. (WPRS#3).

Acting as a role model, the mentor creates a standard of expectation. Consequently, students are expected to attend and be prepared for all rehearsals and performances. Students are expected to display professional work ethics, such as dependability, reliability, cooperation and responsibility. (WPRS#1.4.5.)

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

The initial objective of the practice was to increase the appreciation of jazz through the shared experience of performance. The first ensemble gathered together out of their mutual love for jazz as an art form. The idea was to further expose our students to this uniquely American musical form, and at the same time, increase their ability as musicians and students.

The success of the practice became evident right from the outset. Student interest was immediate, and with each successive year, the number of students auditioning has increased. Correspondingly, the level of student musicianship and performance proficiency has also increased.

From a performance assessment point of view, each year has seen growth in repertoire and rehearsal techniques. Selections included in performance programs have incrementally become more challenging for the musicians and more enjoyable for the audience.

A desired trickle-down effect has occurred at the individual school level. Each of our high schools and two elementary schools now also have jazz bands. The objective of sparking an interest across the district has obviously been met.

At the community level, each year, attendance at the “Black Tie Jazz Bash” has continued to grow. Community response has been overwhelming. The enthusiasm generated by the practice has transcended from mentor to protege to school to community.

In retrospect, the overall objective of fostering a greater appreciation for jazz throughout the school district and community has not only been met, but with each successive year, we have been able to improve and expand on it.